
Briefing

The Electoral Commission

Plans to tackle electoral fraud ahead of May elections

Wednesday 9 March 2015

Electoral fraud

The Electoral Commission has always taken the risk of electoral fraud extremely seriously. Although cases of proven electoral fraud are relatively rare in the UK, any fraud has the potential not only to affect individual voters but also to damage wider public confidence in elections.

This briefing sets out the work that the Commission and others are undertaking to tackle electoral fraud ahead of the May 2016 polls and the referendum on the UK's membership of the EU, following today's publication of the 2015 electoral fraud data.

The Commission has also today [published the allegations of electoral fraud data](#) reported to each police force across the UK. This data shows that there were 481 alleged cases of electoral fraud recorded in 2015. Police forces also recorded 184 other complaints about elections which did not relate to allegations of electoral fraud. The full report and data are available to view on the Commission's website, along with our previous reports and research on electoral fraud.

Our work in this area ahead of May 2016 polls

We work proactively with electoral administrators, police authorities, parties and campaigners to offer practical advice and assistance in preventing and detecting fraud as far as we are able to.

The police are responsible for investigating allegations of electoral fraud and we support them and electoral administrators throughout the year to ensure that their plans represent an effective response to tackle those risks.

Through our work we have identified 18 areas¹ of the country where there is a higher risk of allegations of electoral fraud and we work with the police to help ensure there is extra vigilance in these areas. We will continue to work particularly closely with both the police and electoral administrators in these areas in the run up to the May 2016 elections and the EU referendum to make sure that robust plans are in place that represent an effective response to tackle the risk of allegations of electoral fraud.

We will also continue to make sure that similar plans are in place across the rest of the UK, such as issuing joint guidance with the College of Policing to developing tools for police forces in England and Wales. We have also produced a Manual of Guidance in collaboration with Police Scotland, and with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

Every territorial police force in the UK has an identified Single Point of Contact (SPOC) officer for election related crime. The Commission, together with the National Police Chiefs' Council jointly hosted an annual training seminar for these specialist police officers in February 2016.

Helping voters report fraud

Ahead of the May 2016 elections we will again be working in partnership with Crime Stoppers the national anonymous crime reporting charity, to support and promote the option for people to report evidence or concerns about electoral fraud without giving details which could identify them.

This means that anyone who is concerned about revealing their identity can contact Crime Stoppers on 0800 555 111 and a translation service will be available for those whose first language is not English.

The role of political parties and candidates

The evidence shows that in most instances when electoral fraud is attempted, or committed, it is by candidates and their supporters – voters are the victims. This is demonstrated through our analysis of allegations of electoral fraud data which continually shows the highest number of alleged cases relate to campaigning offences, rather than voting.

¹ Birmingham, Bradford, Blackburn with Darwen, Burnley, Calderdale, Coventry, Derby, Hyndburn, Kirklees, Oldham, Pendle, Peterborough, Slough, Tower Hamlets, Walsall, Woking, Luton, Bristol

Parties from across the political spectrum have seen electoral fraud cases involving their candidates or supporters: it is not something which is confined to small or local parties.

We already work with political parties to help them ensure their candidates and supporters campaign within the law. We publish and regularly update a code of conduct setting out what is, and is not, acceptable behaviour by campaigners, and we work with Returning Officers to remind candidates from all parties (and independents) of their responsibilities.

We have also recently written to all of the declared candidates standing for London Mayor inviting them to publically commit to the Code of Conduct. Those who agree are being listed on our website showing voters that they are committed to tackling unacceptable campaigning behaviour.

Questions for your local Returning Officer and/or police authority

To help with plans to tackle electoral fraud in your constituency, you could ask your local Returning Officer and/or your local SPOC to find out what is happening in your area and what you could do to help.

Find out how activity is being targeted in your area

- What plans do you have in place to detect and prevent fraud, including personation on polling day?
- How are you working together with the police/local authority locally to ensure that cases are properly identified and, if needed, investigated?

Other ways you can help

As well as working with your local SPOC and Returning Officer there are further things you could do.

- **Sign up to the Commission's Code of Conduct for Campaigners** – our voluntary code helps campaigners to understand acceptable campaigning practices.
 - **Support the Law Commission's review of electoral law and ask the UK Government to give the next stage of this work its approval now** – the Law Commissions' review of electoral law is at a crucial stage and will provide a solid foundation for future modernisation of our electoral system. It is currently awaiting the Government's approval to move to the next stage, drafting the new law. We have been urging the Government to give this approval swiftly so that electoral law can be updated. The Law Commissions' proposals include the recommendation to update and simplify several electoral offences and improved ways to deal with complaints when things go wrong. Ultimately this will help to maintain confidence in the electoral process.
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